United Nations

Daily Highlights

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Security Council says Identification Commission should begin identifying and registering potential voters in Western Sahara by 30 June, with view to holding referendum by end of 1994; says it will reconsider MINURSO's future if vote cannot take place by then.

+ Special Representative Akashi says there is "light at the end of the tunnel" after almost two years of fighting in Bosnia and Herzegovina; warns that UNPROFOR needs extra resources to capitalize on progress.

+ Under-Secretary-General Annan says Member States must "stay the course" in peace-keeping operations, warning that disengagement in face of danger undermines principle of collective security.

+ Population Commission hears calls from United States and China for action to address root causes of refugee movements; Russian Federation cites ethnic conflict as major cause of growing refugee problem.

+ Guatemalan Government and URNG sign Agreement on Human Rights asking Secretary-General for creation of international verification mission.

+ Secretary-General appoints Major-General Mohammad Abdus Salam of Bangladesh as Force Commander of ONUMOZ.

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The Security Council today welcomed the Secretary-General's compromise proposal concerning the interpretation and application of criteria to determine voter eligibility for participation in the referendum for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The Council also agreed to the course of action outlined in Option B of his recent report on Western Sahara, whereby the Identification Commission should analyse all applications received and proceed to identify and register potential voters by 30 June. That work would be carried out on the basis of the Secretary-General's proposal, the Identification Commission's terms of reference, and the Settlement Plan.

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In unanimously adopting resolution 907 (1994), the Council said it supported the Secretary-General's continued efforts to obtain the cooperation of both parties. It asked him to report by 15 July on progress in the Identification Commission's work, and on other matters relevant to the fulfilment of the Settlement Plan, with a view to deciding on whatever action was necessary to fulfil the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).

The Council urged strict compliance with the Secretary-General's timetable for Option B, with a view to holding the referendum by the end of 1994. It called on the parties to cooperate fully with the Secretary-General, his Special Representative and the Identification Commission. The Council said that if the referendum could not be held by the end of the year, it would reconsider MINURSO's future, including an examination of options for its mandate and operations.

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Yasushi Akashi, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for the former Yugoslavia, said today there was "light at the end of the tunnel" after more than 22 months of intense fighting throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. He told correspondents at Headquarters that people were walking around without fear of snipers or shelling in Sarajevo and Mostar, and that public services were being restored in the capital. Mr. Akashi was in New York in connection with Security Council deliberations on the renewal of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) mandate. In his recent report to the Council, the Secretary-General recommened that the mandate be extended for twelve months beyond 31 March.

Mr. Akashi went on to say that the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina was still far from stable despite recent progress, with reports of an organized offensive being launched in Maglaj and Bihac. Southern Croatia was also tense and talks on a possible cease-fire there were being held at the Russian embassy in Zagreb. He said there had been a generally encouraging response to appeals for troop reinforcements, but additional resources were needed if UNPROFOR was to capitalize on recent positive developments.

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Under-Secretary-General Kofi Annan said yesterday that Member States must stay the course when participating in peace-keeping operations if those operations are to be successful. Addressing the Special Committee on Peace-keeping Operations as it began its current session, he warned that disengagement by States in the face of danger would undermine the principle of collective security.

Mr. Annan urged States to provide the required resources for peace-keeping operations, and to meet their financial obligations in a timely manner. States should also encourage informed debate on their participation in an operation, as unfavourable public reaction to casualties might otherwise lead them to pull out of the operation. He stressed that unity of command was

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essential for operational effectiveness, and noted that the Secretariat made every effort to keep troop contributors fully apprised of the situation on the ground.

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The United Nations Population Commission yesterday heard concern expressed about the rising numbers of refugees and asylum seekers worldwide. It also heard calls from the United States and China for action to address the root causes of refugee movements. According to the Director of the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, the number of refugees worldwide grew from 8.5 million to 19 million between 1985 and 1993.

The representative of the Russian Federation said that inter-ethnic conflict was a major cause of the increase in refugees. While Russia was observing international norms regarding refugees entering its territory, it could not keep its doors open because of its economic difficulties, he warned. The Dutch representative said admission policies should be implemented in accordance with internationally accepted principles, with all refugees treated equally. International migration could only be controlled by international agreements, he added.

The Commission is currently meeting at Headquarters to review United Nations implementation of the 1974 World Population Conference and the 1984 International Conference on Population.

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The Government of Guatemala and the Unidad Revolucionaría Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) today signed two agreements and a joint statement at a ceremony in Mexico City, according to a United Nations spokesman. The Agreement on Human Rights -- the outcome of two years of negotiations -- included a request to the Secretary-General for the early establishment of an international verification mission.

The second agreement provided a timetable for further talks, to culminate with the signing of a final peace agreement at the end of this year, the spokesman continued. The parties also signed a joint statement on further negotiations on the issue of human rights violations during the armed conflict.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has appointed Major-General Mohammad Abdus Salam of Bangladesh as Force Commander of the United Nations Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ), with effect from 23 March. The new Commander, who has already arrived in Maputo, replaces Major-General Lélio Rodrigues Gonçalves da Silva of Brazil.

Prior to his new appointment, Major-General Abdus Salam served as Chief of General Staff of the Bangladesh Army. He began his military career in 1965.

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